

DEACONESSSES

IN THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

*A SHORT ESSAY ON THE ORDER
AS EXISTING IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH, AND
ON THEIR PRESENT POSITION AND WORK.*

With a Prefatory Note by
HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

REVISED BY THE
VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CHESTER.

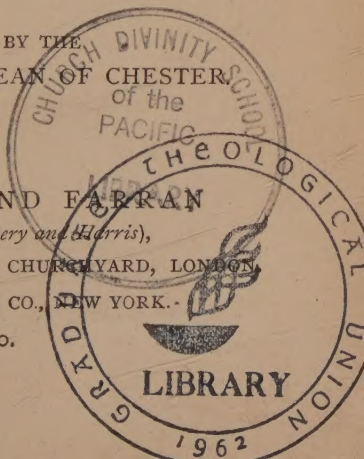
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Lambeth Palace,
S.E.,

15th June, 1880.

MY DEAR MRS. * * * * *

I am sorry to have so long delayed sending you a few words of commendation respecting your essay on "DEACONESSES IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND."

You know how warmly the cause you advocate is approved by me, and I need not say more than that I heartily commend your statements on the subject to the consideration of the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England.

Believe me

Yours very truly,

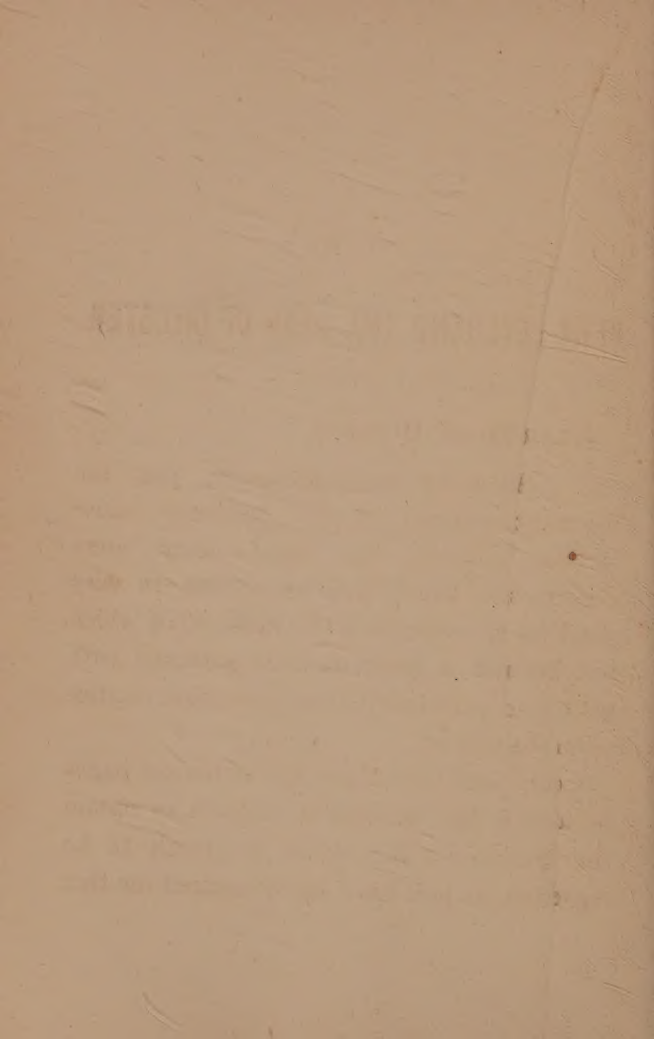
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This Essay is presented to the Deaconess cause, with the earnest desire that it may be made useful to the furtherance of the movement.

Any proceeds derived from its circulation will be given to the Church Deaconess Home, Maidstone.

To the President of this Home, the Very Rev. the Dean of Canterbury, most grateful thanks are due for his kind encouragement in the publication of this Treatise, as well as for his earnest interest and aid in the cause.



TO THE
VERY REVEREND THE DEAN OF CHESTER.

DEAR DEAN HOWSON,

Allow me to dedicate to you, the foremost advocate of the deaconess cause in our country, this short essay upon deaconesses, which you have been so very good as to revise, and the material of which has been in a great measure gathered, with your kind permission, from your able treatise upon the subject.

I only send forth these few imperfect pages because it has become so difficult to obtain that treatise—a fact which is greatly to be regretted, as you have lately assured me that

✓ your opinions are the same as when you first gave them to the world, and that years and experience have only strengthened your conviction of the need which exists for the organised service of Christian women in our Church.

I may add that I am looking forward, the more earnestly, to the re-publication of your book, because my own enthusiasm in the cause was first awakened by its perusal, so that, with God's blessing and guidance, I have for some years owed to your pen, the privilege and happiness of being able to subscribe myself,

Dear DEAN HOWSON

With true and grateful respect,

Yours faithfully,

A DEACONESS IN THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND.

DEACONESSES

IN THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.—EPH. ii. 20, 21.

IT is twenty years since the Dean of Chester commenced his treatise on deaconesses,¹ with the remark that he had no doubt that his book would be opened by many with the question, "What is a deaconess?"

And although in the interim the movement has made great progress in England, the majority, we believe, of persons still, nay, we fear even the majority of the clergy of our Church, have but a vague idea of what the calling and position of a deaconess mean.

The Deaconess Institution at Kaiserswerth,

¹ *Deaconesses*. An Essay reprinted from the *Quarterly Review* (1860). By Dean Howson.

and others on the Continent, are accepted by the Christian world generally, as valuable centres of useful work. But this general acceptance has been for the most part without any knowledge of, or sympathy in, Pastor Fliedner's distinct conception, that in commencing his Deaconess Institution (the first of modern days), he was not only endeavouring to supply a modern want in a judicious and effectual manner, but also to restore an order which existed in the early Church.¹

The object of the present pages is to bring the subject of deaconesses before the minds of those who may not hitherto have given sufficient consideration to the movement. And—to begin—if an answer is needed to the question, "What is a deaconess?" no more simple one can be found than the official definition given to the term, in the formula drawn up in 1862, and signed by our two Archbishops and eighteen of our Bishops, viz., "A deaconess is a woman set apart by a

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 72.

Bishop under that title for service in the Church.”¹

In giving this definition of the office, our Bishops made use of the Apostle Paul's designation, Rom. xvi. 1, where he says, “*I commend unto you Phæbe our sister, who is a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea.*” Upon the translation of the original here, into *servant*, Bishop Lightfoot writes in his book on the authorised version of the New Testament: “If the testimony borne in this passage to a ministry of women in apostolic times had not thus been blotted out of our English Bible, attention would probably have been directed to the subject at an earlier date, and our English Church would not have remained so long maimed in one of her hands.”

Dean Howson says also, “the idea involved in the original Greek word here, is precisely that of helpful service; and it was, no doubt,” the Dean thinks, “in the perform-

¹ See the Bishop's Rules at end of Essay.

ance of such service that Phœbe, the deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea, was sent by St. Paul from Corinth to Rome. No definition," he goes on to say, "is so true—none so honourable to women, nor so important for the other sex to recognise. Whenever the strong become weak, whenever it is not power we need, but influence; when prompt good sense is demanded, then it is not good for man to be alone. Then, and not only then, but at all times, in apostolic days, as well as our own, all true instincts must feel and acknowledge that woman's work is pre-eminently helping work."

Again we quote from Dean Howson. "Besides the mention by St. Paul of Phœbe, there are other allusions in his epistles that evince recognition of woman's service in the Church.¹

"Amongst several others, there is one in 1 Tim. iii. 11, which occurs in the midst of a long passage relating to the diaconate,

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 57.

where it says, '*Even so must their wives be grave.*' The expression *wives* has no authority from the original Greek, the word is simply *women*. And on this verse Bishop Lightfoot¹ likewise remarks in the passage already quoted, 'If the theory of the definite article (in the Greek) had been understood, our translators would have seen that the reference is to deaconesses, not to the wives of the deacons.'¹

"And," Dean Howson continues, in the passage just alluded to, "it should be particularly noticed in connection with this, that in the early part of the chapter no such directions are given concerning the wives of the Bishops, though they are certainly as important as the wives of the deacons. So that it can scarcely be thought otherwise than that the Apostle's directions were for the deaconesses, an order which we find in

¹ Bishop Wordsworth, Bishop Ellicot and Dean Alford are of the same opinion as to the meaning of the Greek here ; also Chrysostom, Grotius, and Bloomfield.

ecclesiastical records for some centuries, side by side with that of deacons."

The Dean quotes from some of these early records. "'It is prescribed that the deacons are to be, like the Bishops, free from blame, and more free for active service, that they may be able to minister to those that need help; and the deaconesses must be zealous in ministering to the women, and both must be ready for errands, and for journeys, and for service of every kind.'

"The allusion to journeys brings at once to our recollection," as he proceeds to say, "the verse already alluded to in Rom. xvi. 1, where Deaconess Phœbe is presented to us as travelling on some Christian errand from Corinth to Rome."¹

"Our sources of information," Dean Howson writes, "are various, and we are not even limited to Christian authorities. For the heathen writer, Pliny, in his celebrated letters to Trajan, speaks of the heroic constancy of

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 235.

the Christian ‘ministræ,’ who were tortured under his orders. Lucian also alludes to the services of these devoted women in prison.”¹

There are handed down to us decrees on the subject, in various councils, and a prayer is still extant which was used in the third century, on the occasion of deaconesses being set apart to their office.

It is preceded by this formulary :—“ As to the deaconess, O Bishop, thou shalt lay thy hands on her, in the presence of the presbyters the deacons, and the deaconesses, and thou shalt say—

“ Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator both of man and of woman, who didst fill with Thy Holy Spirit, Mary, Deborah, Anna, and Huldah, who didst not disdain that Thy only-begotten Son should be born of a woman, who also in the Tabernacle of Testimony, and in the Temple, didst appoint women as the keepers of Thy Holy Gates, look now Thyself on this Thy hand-

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 37.

maid, here set apart for the office of a deaconess ; give unto her Thy Holy Spirit, cleanse her from all impurity of the flesh and of the spirit that she may worthily accomplish the task now committed unto her, to Thy Glory and to the praise of Thy Christ, with Whom, to Thee and the Holy Spirit, be glory and worship, for ever and ever, Amen."

This prayer is sometimes used in the present day, at the Setting Apart of Deaconesses. The service on such occasions is a most solemn one. It has been hitherto held, with one or two exceptions, in the private chapel of the Bishop of the diocese. No Christian woman could surely allow herself to be so set apart, with prayer and the solemn laying on of hands, without a previous consecration of heart to the special service of her Master, and of her Church ; nor, having been thus set apart, could ever lightly abandon the work to which a deaconess devotes her life, for so long as that life shall be left free by God to be so devoted. It must ever be remembered that a deaconess

is under no vows whatsoever; but is at liberty to resign her commission at any time, or to have it taken from her by her bishop.

Before, however, we pass from the early records of deaconesses,¹ we must not omit to mention the biography of St. Chrysostom, A.D. 400, which, as various writers say, is remarkable for its many points of contact with female agency in the Church, and we find that there were forty deaconesses attached to the Mother Church of Constantinople alone, indeed throughout the memoirs of this eminent bishop, there is honorable mention made of many Christian women who laboured under his superintendence. And the name of Olympia, borne by one of his deaconesses, is familiar to all acquainted with these memoirs, bringing before our minds a queenly character of not only high position and large fortune, but one full of grandeur, self-devotion, and courage.

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 41.

After the earlier centuries¹ of the Church, we gradually lose sight of deaconesses in connexion with it, and find on the commencement of Romish sway that a conventual system arose instead. The evils which grew out of this system were exposed at the time of the Reformation, but it was not until about forty-three years ago (at which time Pastor Fliedner commenced, in a very small way at first, the now noble Institution at Kaiserswerth) that any attempt was made to restore the old Apostolic order of deaconesses.

It is not generally known that it was said in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury, about nineteen or twenty years since, that "the effort to restore the order of deaconesses deserved all the encouragement that the Church could give; and it was recommended that guidance should be sought

¹ "We find traces of the existence of the female diaconate both in the East and the West, for from nine to twelve centuries, about two-thirds in fact of the Christian era."—*Woman's Work in the Church*. By John Malcolm Ludlow.

directly from the parochial clergy and from the bishops." ¹

Such guidance has been now for some years granted to the deaconess movement, and the under-named Institutions are established in England, with diocesan sanction and under clerical supervision.

DIOCESE.	POST TOWN.
Canterbury.	Maidstone.
Chester.	Chester.
Ely.	Bedford.
London.	London.
Salisbury.	Salisbury.
Winchester.	Farnham. ²

There is no doubt that the number of Deaconess Institutions is small, compared with the number of Sisterhoods which exist in our land; and by many the two are confounded together, whereas they are upon

¹ *Diaconesses*, p. 143.

² It will be understood that these pages professedly glance only at Deaconess Institutions which are under diocesan control. There are several others, such in particular as the Institution at Mildmay Park, of which too much admiration cannot be expressed as to their useful work.

✓ completely different lines. The sister, as Canon Gore says, is of the Sisterhood, the deaconess is of the Church.¹

More particular attention is directed to this point, for by so many, as Canon Gore remarks in the same paper, the Deaconess Institution is supposed to be but a stepping-stone to a Sisterhood, whereas, as it has been said elsewhere,² the Sisterhood exists primarily for the sake of forming a religious community, but deaconesses live together for the sake of the work itself, attracted to deaconess homes by the want which in most populous towns is calling loudly for assistance, and with the view of being trained therein for spiritual and temporal usefulness amongst the poor.

We may also quote here a passage from *Anglican Deaconesses*, published in 1871, where

¹ Paper read by Canon Gore at the Stoke Church Congress, 1876.

² Fourth Yearly Report of the Maidstone Church Deaconess Home.

the writer says :—"The deaconess movement has this distinctive feature, that it aims at being a public and a Church movement, its one ambition being to strengthen the existing parochial system, by supplying *the part which lacked*, that so, with God's blessing, *all the building fitly framed together* may grow into *an holy temple in the Lord*."

No one can deny that much good and noble work has been done by Sisterhoods, but it is no disparagement to any one line of work to maintain the distinctiveness of another line of work. And with many in the Church of England, to whose hearts its Reformation principles are sacred, it is a subject of deep thanksgiving to Almighty God, that by the restoration of deaconesses to the Church, a most necessary and extensive sphere of usefulness has been opened out to Christian women, essentially distinctive and Protestant in its character.

If the boundary between the two lines of work is sought to be made less distinctive on

the deaconess side, it is greatly to be feared that, as in former centuries, such efforts will only prove suicidal to the deaconess cause.

In America there are evangelical Sisterhoods, and it also promises well for the advancement of the deaconess cause that since the visit of Dean Howson in 1871 to that country, the deaconess movement has been fairly established there, and of late has been making great progress, especially as to the position and maintenance of its deaconesses¹—matters which it is to be regretted that the Church of England has not as yet taken properly into consideration.²

¹ See American Report of Bishop Potter's Memorial House for Deaconesses (1878).

² We may quote here from a paper upon the "Revival of Deaconesses in the English Church," *Monthly Packet*, November, 1878, the following paragraph:—"In the writings of the early Fathers we find constant mention of Deaconesses. . . . We perceive how entirely the Deaconess was looked upon as a necessary member of the Church's staff, in the regulations in the Apostolic Constitutions, for the due appointment of the offertory. They provide that the Bishop shall receive four shares, the Presbyters three, the Deacons two, and the Deaconesses one. Evidently it was as

The subject is, however, now steadily gaining ground, and there is much cause for gratitude that it has found powerful advocates lately in some of the most earnest and able of our clergy. At the Church Congress held in September, 1878, the Rev. F. Pigou, of Halifax, said in the paper which he read—“Why should not the Scriptural and Apostolic Order of Deaconesses be revived, and become a recognised centre of spiritual power in every diocese? The Church of this country, being both episcopal in her discipline and parochial in her machinery, the deaconess would have her proper place. She might be sent to some populous parish, not to the prejudice or exclusion of that help which every pastor should endeavour to find and use in his own parish, but as supplemental to it. May we not,” Mr. Pigou added, “indulge in a hope that as one of the practical

much taken for granted that the Bishop would have deaconesses, as that he would have priests and deacons, on his staff.”

results of this Congress emphatic attention may be directed to the revival of an order so intimately connected with woman's work in the Church ? ”

It is necessarily of importance that deaconess homes should, wherever they are placed, be made a part of the parochial system, and it is essential to their usefulness that they should be situated wherever it is practicable, in parishes, the incumbents of which give them this recognition, and have cordial sympathy with such institutions, so that the inmates may always have the incalculable benefit of the godly support and counsel which only a good pastor can give. And the regular attendance, if possible, daily, at the churches of those parishes where the deaconesses work, is not only helpful spiritually, but is a good example to others, and is in accordance with their fundamental principles as parish workers.

One of the most important and distinctive principles in the organisation of deaconess

institutions, lies in their form of government, which should never be entirely restricted to individuals, whether in the position of chaplains or of lady superintendents.

Pastor Fliedner said at the Conference at Kaiserswerth of 1861, that the history of the Church warned us of the danger of absolute power being placed in the hands of head sisters. The best form of management in this country is thought by the Dean of Chester, and by others whose opinions are of weight, to consist in a council or committee of clergy and laymen under diocesan sanction. And experience will no doubt prove it to be wise to adopt the decision come to at the German Conference, namely, that the deaconess at the head of the institution should always be a member of its council or committee. Every institution also should be under the immediate introspection of one of the clergy, if possible the incumbent of the parish in which it is placed, whether the title of chaplain be adopted or not.

A deaconess institution is only a means to an end. A deaconess is not necessarily the member of a community. There are in the present day unattached deaconesses working in several places in England. The object of the institution is, as it has been said before, to train ladies who, after they have been set apart as deaconesses, go forth to labour in any parish where their services may be required. A deaconess may or may not continue in connection with her institution, but it is desirable for her to do so, in order that she may find there a home-centre at any time of need.¹ Mr. Ludlow wisely remarks :—

¹ Again we quote from *Anglican Deaconesses* :—“ Another distinctive feature is one of importance, and touches upon a very essential point of the Church deaconess plan. It is this : community life is not the end proposed, but only a means to the end, and constitutes an important but merely temporary arrangement with regard to the individual, a training in a household or community being only for that term which may be necessary to fit her for her future profession in all its branches, and to give her the opportunity both of testing herself in the sincerity of purpose and of satisfying competent judges of her personal fitness, physically, mentally, and spiritually for the work.”

"The Protestant Deaconess Institution, instead of estranging its members from the common life of mankind, should simply and solely aim at fitting them to take a better part in it. It should glory rather in sending better women out than in taking the very best in. Like the Church of which it is an instrument, it exists for the world and not for itself; it has to help in conquering the world for its true King." ¹

No lady should be recommended for the deaconess office without sufficient and careful training in nursing, in teaching, and in all parochial work; but it is still more important that she should be an earnest Christian, desirous to follow in her Master's footsteps amongst His poor and suffering, and that she should be possessed of the requisite devotion and capacity for such work. Also, that she should seek to have the spirit of love, of obedience (which essentially implies humility), and of self-reliance—a self-reliance

¹ *Woman's Work in the Church*, p. 208.

of which the spring is God-reliance, and which implies such experience and such a calm power of judgment and of decision as will prevent her *unnecessarily* troubling those under whom she labours.

In the Lower House of the Convocation of Canterbury there was in the month of May the year before last, an interesting debate upon Deaconess Institutions and Sisterhoods.¹ The friends of the former could not but regret the absence at the time of the leading advocates of the Deaconess - Order ; for whereas some of the speakers present dwelt upon what they termed the "higher life," the "more devotional atmosphere," and the "life-long self-sacrifice" of Sisterhoods, there was no one present sufficiently acquainted with the nature of the deaconess movement, to place it in its proper light, and the debate passed without any allusion to the leading principles upon which deaconess institutions are based. Now one of the most important

¹ As reported in *Guardian* of May 22nd, 1878.

of these principles, and it is one upon which the Archbishop of Canterbury dwelt particularly at the setting apart of deaconesses in his diocese some years since, is that, whatever life God gives to any woman is the highest life for that woman, and that in becoming a deaconess, a woman devoting herself to this life must believe that it is the highest life for her, and that in it she gives herself wholly to the Lord. In such surrender a deaconess humbly and faithfully takes up no experiment, but her life-work; although not binding herself by any promise which might prevent her being free to fulfil in the future those duties to which in the good providence of God she might be called. At the same time, wherever the deaconess spirit exists, there must of necessity co-exist a spirit of obedience and order, whilst freedom from all vows is surely consistent with that "liberty" spoken of by St. Paul, as the "*Glorious liberty of the Children of God.*" It is a mistake to suppose that a devotional spirit is not as

much sought after in deaconess institutions as in Sisterhoods ; but it is one in harmony with an unfettered life of active usefulness, and in accordance with the healthful, sound evangelical doctrines of the Church of England.¹

At the Winchester Diocesan Conference, held in October, 1878, the valuable paper read by Canon Sumner cannot but prove helpful to the deaconess cause. From it he is good enough to allow the following quotations. "The abuses incidental to conventual life in the Middle Ages, undoubtedly led to a revulsion of feeling which prevented the Reformed Church from seeking the systematic co-operation of women in furthering the work of Christ in the world. But it is surely a great mistake to suppose that nuns and deaconesses are synonymous terms. Convents are ostensibly houses for the sheltering of those who think that they can serve God better by retiring from the world for purposes of

¹ Letter in *Guardian* of May 29th, 1878, in reference to the above-mentioned debate.

meditation and prayer. Deaconess institutions are for those women who desire, in a stated, formal, and authorised manner, to be set apart for active work in the Church of God. The two are wide as the poles apart, and I would earnestly deprecate any opposition to the work of deaconesses from dread of the gradual introduction of the conventual system. . . . Deaconesses, without doubt, took considerable part in the work of the early Church. Bingham gives a short epitome of their history and their duties, and it is abundantly clear from references to them by the early fathers, and by canons respecting them in various councils, that their work gradually assumed considerable prominence."

Canon Sumner's paper goes on to consider the necessities, dangers, and advantages which surround the deaconess question—Firstly, the necessity for episcopal supervision and control which it needs to keep it strictly within ecclesiastical bounds ; Secondly,

the dangers of vows, of confession, and of the use of books of devotion unauthorised by our Church. Upon confession, he says, that "if our deaconess institutions travel on the lines of the Declaration substantially adopted by the recent Lambeth Conference, which affirms that, grounding her doctrine on Holy Scripture, the Church of England distinctly declares the full and entire forgiveness of sins, through the Blood of Jesus Christ, to all who bewail their own sinfulness, confess themselves to Almighty God with full purpose of amendment of life, and turn with true faith unto Him, &c., there will not," he ventures to think, "be found any difficulty arising from the subject." And with regard to the other danger—the use of services other than those of our Church, he is confident that the only safeguard lies in jealously guarding any departure either by excess or defect from the principles and practices of our Church, which would ensure deaconess institutions being neither latitudinarian on the one hand, nor

Roman Catholic on the other. And he is also of opinion that deaconesses need the protection which a distinctive dress affords, and that it should be a dress which would stamp them as deaconesses, but that it certainly ought not to be of the Roman Catholic pattern.

In conclusion, Canon Sumner's paper remarks:—"It may be asked why do we want deaconess institutions? why are we not satisfied with district visitors, and the like? I reply that there is surely an obvious advantage in having a central institution for the training of these women in the particular line of life to which they have devoted themselves. . . . And besides this we want women who shall be recognised by episcopal authority, set apart to their work as in old times, with the episcopal blessing and imposition of hands—able to do work for God in parishes, unable, perhaps, otherwise, to obtain the services of duly qualified Church helpers. I am perfectly aware—no one more so—by

practical personal experience, that from the many thousand parsonages and squires' houses throughout the length and breadth of the land, a band of ministering servants of the Lord daily go forth on their holy mission of love ; I desire in no way to disparage their services nor to supersede them. But there are women who have no special domestic ties to prevent their self-dedication ; there are some who desire to give themselves up more wholly to the work than it is possible to do amidst the various details of ordinary home life, and it is for these that I plead, that they may find a recognised place of work, and may become, under episcopal supervision, a part of the authorised spiritual machinery of the diocese. Can we not, on such a question as this, rise above party ? It is no party question. Institutions which have found advocates in Fliedner, Arnold, Howson, Pennefather, need certainly not be suspected of necessarily leading to Rome. Why may not we meet on the one common ground of

Church principles, and strive as far as we can, at any rate in the diocese in which through God's providence our own lot in life is cast, to restore to its rightful position the authorised ministry of deaconesses in the Church of England?"¹

Amongst those who have given consideration to the subject of deaconesses, and who have entered practically into it, some are to be found who advocate the system of a solemn promise being given for a term of at least three years. But there is not the smallest ground for the establishment of any such system in the judicious rules of our bishops: and should we not be careful of everything which might seem subversive of the spirit of obedience, which is, generally speaking, a safe rule with regard to all righteous and lawful authority?

Once admit any taking of vows for deaconesses, and there becomes immediately a

¹ A deaconess institution has been, since Canon Sumner's paper was read, established at Farnham.

lessening of the Scriptural freedom which is, and is rightly, the grand and distinctive feature of the order.

A woman who needs to make a vow to keep her steadfast is not a woman of the right material for a deaconess, and the steadfastness which requires a vow of any kind to keep it alive would not be found to contain within it the quiet fortitude, and at the same time the enthusiasm, without which deaconess-work will never be useful nor persistent.¹

¹ Since writing the above sentence the following extract from the *Report of the Oxford Church Congress in 1862*, p. 149, has been sent to the writer by the Dean of Chester, and as coming from the lips of the then Bishop of Oxford is worthy of quotation:—"I should not have felt at liberty to take any part in the arrangements of any sisterhood of which vows of celibacy formed a part, because, first, I see no warrant for them in the Word of God, and it would seem to me that to encourage persons to make vows for which there is no distinct promise given that they should be able to keep them, would be entangling them in a yoke of danger; secondly, because it seems to me that our Church has certainly discouraged such vows; and thirdly, because it seems to me really to be of the essence of such a religious life, that it

Women should not offer themselves for service in the Church until they have made up their minds as to what their desire is for their future lives. The office should not be experimented upon as merely a refuge from disappointment, or as a change from an inactive, dissatisfied existence, but should be sought for and entered into as a God-given sphere of service. No woman should allow herself to be set apart as a deaconess unless in doing so she is conscientiously giving herself to the Church. It might possibly happen, however, that a daughter or sister, after she has become a deaconess, may, in God's Providence, find it necessary to return to her home duties : and should any promise whatso-

should be continued, not because in a moment of past fervour a vow was made, but because by a continual life of love, that life is *again and again* freely offered to that service to which it was originally dedicated. I feel, therefore, that I may venture to say that instead of the perpetual vows representing the higher, it is the admission of a lower standard. I have felt it my duty to say this, that there might be no mistake as to my view."

ever stand in the way of a Christian woman being at liberty to answer to the call of any duty which is clearly a God-sent one? Neither should it be supposed that marriage is impossible for a deaconess, if only that marriage is "*in the Lord*," and if it should be shown to be so clearly His way for her, that in marrying she will have the approval of her own conscience and the sanction of the Bishop of her diocese: in such case the deaconess spirit will have but a different sphere for its exercise for every real deaconess is a deaconess for life.

The term of probation enjoined by the Bishops' rules is not only good for training, but should admit of ample opportunity for each probationer to be absolutely certain that she is choosing the life which God would have her to choose.

Associates, resident or non-resident, who have cordial sympathy with the deaconess movement, will be found a source of strength to deaconess institutions, and those institutions will afford to associates most useful

training, both as to work and self-discipline. The Bishops' rules are also suggestive on this point.

The deaconess office being still comparatively new to the English mind, new as to a knowledge of its primitive origin, as well as its present nature and work, is it not incumbent on those dignitaries and clergy of our Church who heartily wish well to the cause, to make it, and their approval of it, more generally known?¹

The movement requires from its friends greater faith for it in God, and greater faith in itself. Does not any movement heartily opposed grow more quickly than one unheartily countenanced? The clergy have, and thank God that they have, great power and influence; and if our well-born and

¹ "It is of the utmost importance that clergymen in their Confirmation Classes, Missionary Meetings, Scripture Classes, &c., &c., make the female youth and their parents familiar with the nature of the deaconess office and with the work."—Resolution No. 4 passed at the Kaiserswerth Conference, 1861.

wealthy women without direct home work and domestic ties were to have the office of a deaconess set before them as a position to be desired—a position of great influence, at once holy and honourable, we might perhaps see deaconess Olympias in our own days. And those women with means, to whom God has given the blessed gift of domestic ties and duties, might be led to help, out of their abundance, those poorer sisters who would gladly present that first gift of all, *their own selves*, to the service of their Master and their Church; but are held back by the (perhaps, unexpected) necessity of earning their bread in whatever work they take up.

Amongst the poorer classes also it is most needful to make the deaconess movement understood and appreciated. To the uneducated, the very term “home” or “institution” has a very questionable interpretation—to them the name of deaconess itself bears no significance. And although (notwithstanding their sometime prejudice and ignorance)

they quickly learn to love those who, with ready tact, only smile at their misapprehension, and who soon become to them as "friends of their own," still a few words of explanation at first, from the clergy of the parish, would make it generally known that the term of deaconess is a Scriptural one, therefore ought to be beloved, that it is at once, as Dean Howson says, Primitive and Protestant,¹ and that the position is an accredited one in the Church.

There seems to be sometimes a shrinking, even amongst the friends of the cause, from giving to it a just consideration as an ecclesiastical, not a lay, position; (ecclesiastical merely, however, as belonging to the Church.) This arises from perhaps an unconscious fear that a deaconess may be apt to think of her office more highly than she ought to think. But does not this judgment lie in an error as to human, or rather let it be said woman, nature? Must not any true honour conferred,

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 149.

confer with it, of necessity, true humility? And those whose sentiments may unconsciously be coloured by such a fear have not surely for others, although they may have done so for themselves, gauged the heights, or depths, of that "self-renunciation, in which all things become ours, because we cease to be our own." ¹

Besides, the very term "deaconess" means just "a helpful servant." Perhaps one reason why our bishops wish the title to be prefixed to the christian and surname, is to keep this idea of humble, helpful service continually before the mind of her upon whom it has been bestowed. "A servant of servants," *ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*. This should be, and it may be hoped is, the integral meaning of the title and the office to every one who is privileged to bear it.

Between the deaconesses of a parish and the district visitors of that parish there should always be the closest association. Generally

¹ *The Bertram Family*. By Mrs. Charles.

speaking, large parishes need not only the refining, helpful influence which kindly Christian women bring with them from their own homes—the family interests of both visitors and visited making a common bond which must act beneficially on each; but such parishes mostly need as well, organised, trained workers—workers whose time is wholly at the disposal of the clergy, and entirely free from home and social claims.¹

Over and above the valuable work, which can best be done by district visitors in a parish, there are many descriptions of work which can best be done by deaconesses.

Amongst several others is not only constant spiritual ministry, but the regular attendance and nursing of the sick poor in

¹ “One great result is that a parish with a deaconess has always a certain amount of district visiting which is not liable to interruption, the clergyman has some feminine help upon which he can rely; this help, too, is practised help. . . The official work of the deaconess will bring out voluntary work that did not exist before, and give new life and encouragement to that which did exist.”—*Deaconesses*, p. 205.

their own homes, by night as well as day, when necessary, especially in times of epidemic and infectious illness ; the seeking out and rescuing of the lost, for which latter the quiet, unremarkable, and yet distinctive dress enjoined on a deaconess by the bishops, makes her especially suitable, as also the quick perception and readiness, seldom acquired except through training and experience. Night classes, likewise, for both men and women of the rougher description, form an important part of deaconess work.¹

And if hardworking deaconesses, who devote their whole time to parochial work, find, as is too often the case, that at the end of the week they have not been able to get through a tithe of the work that there is to be done, how is it possible that district visitors, however excellent, can satisfy the requirements of an earnest and laborious

¹ Pastor Fliedner says that "the parish deaconess comes nearest to the apostolical and ancient deaconess in her work."

clergyman for the poor of a large parish, when district visitors, as a rule, can only give to parochial work their surplus time from prior domestic and social claims, which they often do with the most generous self-sacrifice?

Oh, that more of the free Christian women of our land might be stirred up to come forward to the aid of the deaconess cause!¹ Women sitting at ease, left free by God perhaps for this very purpose of help, and yet satisfied to "sit still," whilst everywhere there is such great need of assistance. The ignorance which exists amongst our overcrowded population is scarcely to be credited, nor the want and the sin which are on all sides.

¹ Bishop Wordsworth, quoted in *Deaconesses*, p. 57, says:—"It would be a blessed work of Christian charity to restore the office of widow and deaconess in the Church to their primitive simplicity, and so to engage the affections and sympathies, and to exercise the quiet piety and devout zeal of Christian women, old and young, in the service of Christ in a regular and orderly manner under the guidance of lawful authority, and with its commission and benediction, according to the apostolic model prescribed by the Holy Ghost."

To see but the surface of a well-ordered parish gives no idea of this ignorance, want, and sin, which only become too palpable when one dives beneath the surface. Our illiterate poor require to be instructed and humanised, as well as attracted towards the beautiful services of our Church, by having the love of its Divine Head brought home to their hearts in personal contact, and our Saviour's example of *seeking* the lost to save them, not only by loving words and deeds, but also by loving touch, needs to be more practically carried out.

Much is said in the present day about Charity Organisation Societies, and there is no doubt that such have been most useful in detecting imposture and in ministering to cases of real distress; but might not the best, the most effectual, and at the same time the most economical charity organisation be found in organised deaconess work? Would there be the same amount of sin and imposition requiring investigation, if pious, refined

women, under their clergy's supervision, lived, as it were, everywhere amongst the poor, gaining by this means a thorough knowledge of their characters and requirements, and exerting a beneficial influence over their lives and homes?

All workers are willing to recognise the fact that the more work there is done, the more there is to do ; how great then is the necessity for more workers, and how blessed might be the result to both, if the two ends of society could be brought nearer to each other ! Why has the All-wise Master permitted the differences of wealth and poverty ? Was it for the separation between classes which exists—the wasteful luxury on the one hand, the pitiful want on the other ; or has not our Lord, in the lesson of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rather shown us *that* approximation of riches and penury, which might have been made a mutual blessing ?

How is it that there are so few deaconesses ? Is it entirely that the movement is but little

known, and still less understood? Is it entirely that only extreme movements succeed quickly? Or is it not also, as Dean Howson writes, that "our comfortable, luxurious English homes are an enchanted ground on which it is very difficult to awake, even when the voice of the poor is ringing in our ears, and in many cases the very facility of our religious advantages has added to the potency of the charm."¹

It is indeed too much the habit of the women of our better classes to look upon a routine of social and domestic duties as their *only* allotted ones; certainly, when in the good Providence of God such duties are given, they are the first for those to whom they are given. Those wives and mothers and daughters upon whom God has bestowed the most sacred of all womanly duties, and who are in such duties seeking with singleness of heart His glory, are perhaps doing Him the highest of all service, and are most likely

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 156.

exercising the holiest and most enduring influence that it is possible for woman in any station of life to exercise. But over and above these there is an immense margin. We learn from statistical reports how much greater is the number of women in the world than is the number of men. Does it not therefore seem as if there must be some wise purpose for this great surplus number, which has not yet been rightly apprehended? May not the effort then to restore the order of deaconesses supply, at least, one wide and sacred channel in which many out of this great surplus might be made use of for God's glory, and for the amelioration of human sin and suffering?

Amongst our middle and upper classes how many families possess several unmarried daughters, often without sufficient occupation, some of whom may wish to devote their lives to Christian work, but who are perhaps held back by their parents from doing so; whilst those very parents would willingly part from

all their daughters in marriage ! How many single ladies in our land are living in boarding-houses, or in solitary apartments ! How many widows¹ are there, childless—or, it may be, whose families no longer need their care and help ! Are not all such persons for the most part leading lives without any definite aim ? many of them perhaps filled with an indefinite longing for more definite work ? Might not such women, by responding to the desire for organised work expressed by the bishops and pastors of their Church, become at once more useful, and consequently more happy, by devoting themselves in this way to their Master's service ?

There are many influences which no doubt tend to check enthusiasm for the deaconess cause which, it may be hoped, will wear away as it becomes better understood. Firstly, the arrangements connected with it need to

¹ A careful study of the Scriptures with a view to this question would seem, the writer thinks, to make the deaconess office especially suitable for such widows.

be placed ecclesiastically on a more certain basis as regards its official position and support.¹ Secondly, the English mind has not yet generally accepted the fact that it is, as Dean Howson says, "quite as possible and quite as natural and right for refined Christian women of good position and independent means to be employed confessedly in organised work for God, as it is for well-born, educated men to be so." And the idea also needs to become familiarised amongst us that where God has bestowed His gift of poverty upon any Christian gentlewoman suitable in every respect to become a deaconess, it should be made possible, and be considered honourable for her to do so.² In some minds there

¹ "The chain of Catholic tradition in respect of woman's work in the Church, which the Church of Rome had snapped, has thus by Protestant hands been practically restored, and the new Female Diaconate needs but a franker and more solemn consecration at the hands of the Reformed Churches of Christendom, to bear, as I believe, yet more abundant fruit."—*Historical Notes on Deaconesses and Sisterhoods*. By John Malcolm Ludlow. P. 217.

² "Is it quite fair that the lady who, through good fortune,

appears to be an idea that if women could earn their maintenance as deaconesses, they might be led for the sake of the mere maintenance to seek the office.¹ Are women, then, more mercenary than men? Or could any Christian woman wish to be made a deaconess, knowing that in entering upon the office she must choose in all things not to please herself—that she must be devoted, persevering, obedient, and hardworking—unless the love of that Master, Who *pleased not Himself*, was inspiring her with the true-hearted desire to follow in His footsteps, by giving herself to ministry amongst His poor?

has enough money for her own wants should merely on that account be in a position to perform a more elevated act of Christian love than she who, having nothing, must of dire need feed and clothe herself before she can minister to others?" —*Anglican Deaconesses*, p. 20.

¹ "It is certain that the highest Christian devotion may be found in those who receive remuneration for their spiritual work. But it is a higher form both of labour and reward if all that the labourer wishes is to have facilities to serve God freely, and if *having food and raiment*, she is *therewith content*." —*Deaconesses*, p. 115.

“It is characteristic of the period we live in,” to quote from Dean Howson’s treatise again, “that there is what has been called ‘a congestion to the metropolis’—that is, the accumulation of dense masses of the labouring and distressed population in our larger towns; but there is a correlative fact which is not always observed with equal distinction of view, namely, the radiation outwards from our great towns of the wealthy and educated. The railway system, &c., gives to those in competent circumstances the opportunity of finding a home in the midst of fresh air and country scenery. Meanwhile the poor and degraded are accumulating in increasing numbers, without any proximity of culture and gentle influence, which is found in a rural village, and which used to be found in old-fashioned times even in the places of dense population. Thus there is a vast and widening gulf between the rich and the poor, between the power of good influence on the one hand, and the tendency

to hopeless degradation on the other. This change is inevitable, but it has also its favourable side. Vast and incidental evils are however connected with it, and our plain duty is to inquire what supplementary provision it demands, in addition to what we already have, for raising and rescuing and evangelising the poor.”¹

It is to meet this great need of the present day that deaconess institutions,² which should ever be placed within easy reach of the poor, are so much required. From the removal of the homes of the better classes from the town to the country, clergymen are often left badly off for even Sunday-school teachers as well as for district visitors. The deaconess therefore, belonging to all classes, and spending her life chiefly amongst the very lowest, worst, and most suffering, becomes a link between high and low, rich and poor, and

¹ *Deaconesses*, p. 23.

² It will be found desirable, and quite practicable in such institutions, to combine with regular work the healthful atmosphere of a home-like life.

thus helps to prevent the common brotherhood from a still wider severance, and to establish a greater belief amongst the people in the sympathy of their clergy and of the wealthier classes, who so often minister to the sorrowful and destitute through her agency.

For the establishment and furtherance of deaconess work in our land both friends and funds are required. Institutions are constantly receiving applications¹ from overworked clergy of over-grown parishes for assistance, which assistance such institutions

¹ Such applications would no doubt be still more frequent if deaconess work were made more widely known amongst all classes, so that parishes requiring the help of a trained worker might be found willing and ready to maintain one. The question as to how such means shall be found for poor parishes, is one which it is to be hoped will ere long be dealt with ecclesiastically. Even in cases where a deaconess has independent means, the cost of her maintenance should still be a parochial matter, for everything is of importance which would aid in preventing the work of a deaconess from being looked upon, either by herself or others, as desultory work. In this way, also, help towards the expenses of training others might be afforded by a deaconess with means.

are only able here and there to supply. Lack of means in too many instances prevents institutions from receiving and sending forth women who have not competence for self-support ; and women who have such competence are very slow in responding to the urgent need which exists for their services.

The poor always ye have with you. Has not our Lord in these words left us a precious legacy ? whilst there may well ring upon our hearts, and nerve them to the attempt of succour, that solemn and yet full encouragement : *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.*

Torn asunder by extremes, our Church never stood so much in need as she does now of earnest, devoted servants, desirous not only to avoid extremes, but also to preserve that unity which every member of Christ's Church should strive strenuously to uphold.

Let us pray then to Him, Who, when

upon earth, graciously accepted the ministry of women from His Cradle to His Cross, where, as Dean Henson says "the earliest deaconesses were found," to Him Whose first gracious Resurrection-word was "woman," that He would put it into the hearts of the free Christian women of our land to come forward in obedience to His example, and to give their sympathy and *their own selves* to the aid of the deaconess cause, the greatest name of which is—*deaconess*.

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.

DEACONESSSES IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

1871.

*Principles and Rules suggested for adoption
in the Church of England.*

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

(a) Definition of a Deaconess.

A DEACONESS is a woman set apart by a Bishop, under that title, for service in the Church.

(b) Relation of a Deaconess to a Bishop.

(1) No Deaconess, or Deaconess Institution, shall officially accept or resign work in a Diocese without the express authority of the Bishop of that Diocese, which authority may at any time be withdrawn.

(2) A Deaconess shall be at liberty to resign her commission as Deaconess, or may be deprived of it by the Bishop of the Diocese in which she is working.

(c) *Relation of a Deaconess to an Incumbent.*

No Deaconess shall officially accept work in a parish (except it be in some non-parochial position, as in a hospital or the like) without the express authority of the incumbent of that parish, which authority may at any time be withdrawn.

(d) *Relation of a Deaconess to a Deaconess Institution.*

In all matters not connected with the parochial or other system under which she is summoned to work, a Deaconess may, if belonging to a Deaconess' Institution, act in harmony with the general rules of such Institution.

II. RULES SUGGESTED.

(a) *Probation.*

It is essential that no one be admitted as Deaconess without careful previous preparation, both technical and religious.

(b) *Dress.*

A Deaconess shall wear a dress which is at once simple and distinctive.

(c) *Religious Knowledge.*

It is essential to the efficiency of a Deaconess that she should maintain habits of prayer and meditation, and aim at continual progress in religious knowledge.

(d) Designation and Signature.

It is desirable that a Deaconess shall not drop the use of her surname, and with this end in view it is suggested that her official designation should be "*Deaconess A.B.*" (Christian and Surname), and her official signature shall be "*A.B., Deaconess.*"

P.S.—It is desirable that each Deaconess Institution should have a body of Associates attached to it for the purpose of general council and co-operation.

Signed by the Archbishops and eighteen Bishops.

A. C. CANTUAR.
W. EBOR.
J. LONDON.
S. WINTON.
J. C. BANGOR.
A. C. BATH & WELLS.
HARVEY CARLISLE.
W. CHESTER.
R. D. CHICHESTER.
E. H. ELY.
F. EXON.

C. J. GLOUCESTER &
BRISTOL.
J. HEREFORD.
G. A. LICHFIELD.
C. LINCOLN.
J. F. OXON.
W. C. PETERBOROUGH.
T. L. ROCHESTER.
G. SARUM.
C. ST. DAVID'S.

LONDON:
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C.

